

IN MEMORIAM

SUNDER LAL HORA

(*With a plate*)

To most of us associated with the activities of the various scientific organizations of the country, and latterly of the Indian Board for Wild Life, the news of the death of Dr. Sunder Lal Hora, which occurred on 8th December 1955, has come as a grievous shock, and to the many who knew him more intimately as the realization of the loss of a dear friend.

This loss is all the more poignant when one's personal bond with him dating back to over three decades is irrevocably snapped by the cruel hand of death. There appears a tragic touch in it when I recall the circumstances of our meeting in my house in May last under the shadow of a bereavement afflicting me. Dr. Hora immediately on his return from Madras, where he had gone to attend the All-India Zoo Superintendents' Conference, hurried to bring to me, with his overflowing kindness, solace and comfort in my sorrow due to the loss of my son who happened to be a distinguished pupil of his and associated with him in his researches. Alas, what an irony of fate that before a half-year had ended he himself was to be no more!

My earliest contact with Hora was in 1923, when at the request of Col. R. B. Seymour Sewell, the then Director, I undertook the work of rearrangement and overhauling of the bird collection of the Zoological Survey of India. For quite a number of years thereafter I was a regular visitor to the Indian Museum, and after the day's work when I had to pass by his room a broad smile from Hora would welcome me in and we seldom failed to beguile ourselves in each other's company for a while. We had a common meeting ground in the hall of the Asiatic Society as well, and my countryhouse with its extensive fish tank and aviary was always a centre of great attraction for him, which he made into a relaxing holiday resort.

Hora, who began his research career in 1917 at the age of 22, was recruited to the Zoological Survey of India as a research scholar in 1919 and appointed an Assistant Superintendent in 1921. While still a student at the Government College, Lahore, he discovered the presence of Haversian Canals in the limb bones of *Rana* and discussed the homologies of Weberian Ossicles of *Labeo rohita*. His work on the fish and fisheries of India earned him the D.Sc. of the Punjab University in 1922, and in 1928 his studies on the ecology, bionomics and evolution of torrential fauna with special reference to the organs of attachment secured him the D.Sc. of the Edinburgh University. For a period of five years (1942-47) he was Director of Fisheries of undivided Bengal, coming back then to the Zoological Survey of India as its Director, which post he held till his death.

A believer in hard work, his output of scientific literature was prodigious; he published some 400 papers on various subjects in many foreign and Indian journals, including the pages of the *Journal of the*

Bombay Natural History Society. To celebrate the Silver Jubilee of his first scientific contribution his numerous past students, colleagues and admirers produced in 1951 a complete bibliography of his publications up to 1950¹. The titles of his papers indicate the vast and varied field of his activities, and the volume is a fitting monument to his eminence and zeal as a scientific worker. He was, however, best known as an ichthyologist, though his contributions in other fields are also of great importance. Primarily a systematist interested in freshwater fishes of the Oriental Region, he held a broad vision of this branch of zoology and his papers are full of interesting observations on the ecology and bionomics of the fishes he studied. His taxonomic work, especially on the hill-stream fishes, led him to probe into the problem of the changing river systems of India due to Himalayan tectonic movements and to enunciate what is now well known as 'Hora's Satpura Hypothesis', which attempts to explain the presence of Malayan elements in the fauna of Peninsular India.

On the applied side, his studies on the pond culture of fishes for increasing food production have aroused world-wide interest, and in 1949, at Lake Success, he was invited by the United Nations Organisation to open a discussion on 'Pond culture of warm water fishes'. He was interested in the conservation of fishes of economic importance, especially the migratory species, and made notable contributions to our knowledge of the biology of the Indian Shad, *Hilsa*, which was subsequently taken up as an international problem for intensive investigations. In 1952 he was the chairman of the *Hilsa* Sub-Committee of the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council.

Dr. Hora had always been interested in the scientific knowledge possessed by ancient Hindus, especially in the field of fish and fisheries, as revealed in Sanskrit literature and archaeological pieces such as the edicts of Asoka and potteries of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Those who have heard him speak either in the Indian Museum or in the Asiatic Society, Bengal, will recall the great interest he aroused in his audiences.

Essentially a student of Nature he was deeply interested in the preservation of wild life and in the establishment of National Parks in India. He was the first Hony. Secretary-General of the Indian Board for Wild Life.

Dr. Hora took a lively interest in the welfare of the Bombay Natural History Society. He was an active member of the Society's Advisory Committee since 1945 and his valuable advice and suggestions were always eagerly sought and freely given.

Among the many academic distinctions conferred on him by foreign and Indian scientific institutions, he was the recipient of the Asiatic Society's 'Joy Gobind Law Memorial Medal' (1944), the National Geographical Society of India's 'Jawaharlal Nehru Medal' (1951) and the Zoological Society of India's 'Sir Dorab Tata Memorial Medal' (1951).

By his sudden death we sadly miss a personality of noble character, and charming courtesy endowed with great qualities of heart and mind, an eager willingness to help, and a wide knowledge generously placed

¹ A limited number of copies of the Bibliography is still available at the Bombay Natural History Society.



DR. SUNDER LAL HORA